

Available online: <http://jurnal.ustjogja.ac.id/index.php/ELP>

Journal of English Language and Pedagogy, 2 (2), 2019, pp. 153-161

Eight-grade English textbooks evaluation in Tegal, Central Java

Raksi Hajar Prawestri

Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa, Jalan Kusumanegara No.157, Yogyakarta 55165, Indonesia

*Corresponding author. Email: rh.prawestri@gmail.com

Abstract

This research is aimed at measuring whether the three books used in the secondary schools in Tegal i.e “*Mandiri: Practise Your English Competence*”, “*Interactive English 2*”, and “*New Headway*” are right or not, and revealing the strength and weaknesses of the three books based on the theories of excellent textbook developed by the researcher based on the Tomlinson’s (2003) framework. This research is evaluation research. The data were collected through observation, questionnaire, and document analysis. The data were analysed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldana’s flow model of qualitative data research, which includes data collection, data reduction, data display, and giving the conclusion. The study found out that “*Mandiri: Practise Your Sentence*” meets only in language level criteria of excellent textbook, “*Interactive English 2*” all the five criteria, and “*New Headway*” meets three criterias. The research also found out that the strength of “*Mandiri: Practise Your Sentence*” relies on its language level, which is understandable and straightforward for the eighth graders. Its main weaknesses lie in the number of tests in every unit which does not cover all the skills learnt, and it does not have an excellent form of illustrations, all are too simple and uninteresting for the eighth graders. The strength of “*Interactive English 2*” lies in its colourful and attractive photos and cartoons that attract the students and its use of authentic text that is trendy in graphic design. Its main weakness lies in its focus on controlled practice. Meanwhile, the strength of “*New Headway*” comes from the attractive illustration and its use of communicative activities at the activities to make the students more creative and active in the classroom. But the main weakness lies in its sentences, which are too hard to understand for the eighth graders in Tegal.

Keywords: criteria of good textbooks, English program, evaluation

Introduction

Many state documents, such as the 2013 Curriculum, have been issued to improve the quality of English Language Teaching (ELT) and learning in the education system. However, the question ‘How to make English teaching and learning effective?’ remains a concern for the government, educational officials, and administrators. The most recent change in ELT in Indonesia has been in the curriculum and textbooks.

In 2017, a new series of textbooks by Nur Zaida. was introduced and used as an English textbook for the junior school secondary education level in grades 7, 8, and 9, especially in Tegal Regency. Since it replaced the previous books used in Tegal junior high schools, it has been a subject of much controversy among teaching staff. Some teachers are enthusiastic about it, saying it is carefully planned and relevant to current ELT trends in Indonesia. Others argue that carefully planned as it is, the series may not be useful because it has been designed to suit the needs of learners in more developed areas which are – economically, socially, culturally, and politically speaking – different from remote areas, such as Tegal district. Some teachers regard the series as a helpful guide, showing teachers and learners where they are going and what is coming next so that there is a sense of structure and progress. Those who are opposed to the textbook say it contains uninteresting material with irrelevant topics, which do not cater to the needs of students in remote areas, and which may inhibit teachers’ initiative and creativity. The researcher views that most of the comments and complaints are subjective and intuitive rather than based on empirical evidence.

Indeed, though there are criticisms and praises from stakeholders, there have so far been no studies evaluating this series of textbooks. Some of teachers in Tegal saying that the recommended textbooks contain uninteresting material use additional textbooks. The additional textbooks serve to support and complete the materials or activities which are not found in the main textbooks recommended for use in Tegal. Based on the existing problem, the researcher conducted a preliminary observations in the secondary schools in Tegal Regency. After preliminary research, the researcher found that there are six regionals (komisariat wilayah) to divide junior high schools (SMP) in Tegal Regency. The researcher took the example of three schools from three different regionals as representatives of all regions to find out whether the textbooks used by teachers as teaching materials for students in accordance with the agreement of the teachers professional development forum (MGMP) were appropriate textbooks or not.

After the researcher made preliminary observations on 8th-grade teachers, each school had one supporting book for students that was agreed by the teacher's professional development forum (MGMP); "*Mandiri: Practise Your Sentence* " and supporting book as a teacher's book. The results of preliminary observations in three schools also revealed that there were two different books were also used by teachers in Tegal as complementary material, tasks and activities. The two books were "Interactive 2" and "*New Headway*". Although there are criticisms and praises from stakeholders about the use of several books in the teaching-learning process in Tegal, there have so far been no studies evaluating these textbooks.

This research was an attempt to evaluate three of these textbooks, which are designed for beginners of English. This textbooks evaluation was carried out in eight lower secondary schools in three schools in Tegal Regency. The participants in the study were some teachers using the textbooks in the school year of 2018/2019. The data were collected from teachers and document review through the instruments of observations and some documents. This research aimed to elucidate the strengths and weaknesses of the books used in the teaching and learning context especially in Tegal, and to know whether the three English textbooks meet the level of good textbooks referring to the evaluation criteria as arranged by the researcher based on the Tomlinson's (2003) evaluation textbook framework criteria that was modified and improved using evaluation criteria from other authors.

This research limits the problem by focusing on evaluating the textbooks to find whether the three textbooks meet the criteria of a good textbook or not and also finding the strengths and weaknesses of the textbooks.

The problems formulations of this research are: Are the three English textbooks used by the eighth graders in Tegal meet the criteria for a good textbook based on the evaluation criteria based on the Tomlinson's (2003) framework? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the three English textbooks used by eighth graders in Tegal based on the evaluation criteria of good textbooks as arranged by the researcher based on the Tomlinson's (2003) framework?

Literature Review

English Language Teaching

Language is an important aspect of human life. Through the language, someone interacts with each other. In other words, language is a resource for social life. English has become an international language that is taught by many people in the world. Bill (2003) as cited in Fentari (2018) states that English language teaching (ELT), that is, the teaching of English as a second or foreign language, is usually portrayed in the professional literature as being primarily concerned with the mental acquisition of a language.

It can be inferred that English Language Teaching (ELT) is a teaching-learning process of a second or foreign language which appears in response to the fact language plays an important aspect of human life. Meanwhile, teaching foreign language for middle schools is

different from teaching English to children or adult learners. Junior high school students cannot keep their focus when they are studying for a long time. Based on that case, teachers need to use appropriate media in their teaching-learning process. Teachers should be creative and selective for choosing the textbook that will be used to teach students especially for teaching English for students at junior high schools because the book should be in line with the basic principle of the 2013 Curriculum.

Curriculum

In the 2013 Curriculum, in delivering the subject, the teacher once was recommended to use a scientific approach. This approach composes five steps, mainly observing, questioning, experimenting/exploring, associating and communicating. Teachers are not the only knowledge providers for students but also the role model for them. However, students are asked to look for the other resources available in their surroundings.

Teachers should be creative and selective when choosing the textbook that they will use to teach students, especially in teaching English to junior high school students, which requires teachers to find a book which is in line with the basic principles of the 2013 Curriculum.

Textbook

Textbooks according to Nunan (2003, p. 226) are prepackaged, published books used by the students and teachers as the primary basis for a language course, ranging from those that are broadly focused on developing all language skills to those that focus on a specific skill such as writing or specific area such as hotel management. They may also include audio-cassettes or CDs, videos, workbooks, CD-ROMs, test packages, internet materials, and occasionally a teacher's guide.

A textbook is a learning material specially designed for specific educational settings in order to be used throughout the country. Textbook is seen as beneficial in the teaching and learning process for several reasons; textbook is used by students and teachers in learning activities, and the material in the textbooks is one source of learning or everything that makes learners easier to acquire some information, knowledge, experience, and skills in the learning process and textbook is an organized book to guide students to know about science. Textbooks have a significant role as they are considered as "primary vehicles for delivering content knowledge, for determining in large measure what goes on in a class" and for assessing what students do and do not. A majority of teachers consider textbooks as the only teaching resource. Textbooks do not only influence what and how students learn, but also what and how teachers teach.

Based on the important role of textbook toward learning activity, a good textbook should be selected in order to be able to support the success of teaching and learning because if the teacher uses a textbook without considering the quality, it is possible that teaching will deviate from the objective.

Textbook Evaluation

Textbook evaluation is an attempt to measure the potential value of textbooks (Tomlinson, 2011). It involves making judgments about the effects of textbooks on people (learners, instructors, and administrators) who use them. These effects may be measured through such features as the: credibility, validity, flexibility, etc. of the textbook.

In this research, textbook evaluation can be defined as the process of collecting information about a textbook and analyzing this data to find out what works well, and what needs complementing, balancing, or eliminating for a particular course of instruction.

Evaluation Criteria of Good Textbook

There are many variables which may affect the success or failure of a textbook in assisting a particular course of instruction. Accordingly, in carrying out an evaluation, evaluators need to take many decisions. One is the selection of criteria for evaluation because no general list of criteria is perfect. The criteria may vary, depending on the specific circumstances of teaching and learning contexts. Many useful approaches and checklists for evaluation criteria have been proposed by Ellis (1997), McDonough and Shaw (1998), McGrath (2002), Tomlinson (2003), Nuruhidin, Putra, Pamungkas, Ardiyanto, and Saputro (2018). The difference of criteria stems from different particular ELT contexts. Evaluators can choose from the available checklists for their evaluation, or they can select their own criteria to reflect the priorities of their own specific teaching and learning contexts.

The following sets out a range of approaches to textbook evaluation and their accompanying criteria (see Ellis, Tomlinson, McGrath, Littlejohn, etc.). They all tend to evaluate textbooks on four main aspects, including: (1) The internal content of the textbook; (2) The aims and approaches; (3) The supporting sources; and (4) The physical appearance.

Evaluation Criteria Used in this Research

The systematic and principled evaluation criteria are very important because in this teaching and learning, context material ‘constitutes the main exposure which learners have to the target language’. The researcher developed the evaluation criteria based on Tomlinson’s (2003) framework, adding some more criteria from other authors through a thorough reading of the related literature. The modified framework version for material evaluation used in this study is discussed in further detail as follows:

Pre-use evaluation

To gain a quick impression and predictions of the potential value of a textbook, an evaluator should evaluate its physical appearance and content pages.

Physical appearance

The evaluation of the physical appearance covers the price, the quality, and size of paper the book is printed on; whether the print is easy to read; and the pictures, colors, artwork, lesson structures, and activities. Learners may have a feeling of ease when they use textbooks with lots of white space, pictures, and illustrations related to their culture.

Content pages

The evaluation of the content pages includes checking the author’s, and the publisher’s credentials and their standing and reputation in the field of writing and publishing textbooks. It is also essential to look at the publisher’s ‘blurb’ (i.e. the brief description of the book on the back cover) because it enables people to assess ‘what the books say about themselves’ (Cunningsworth, 1984, p. 2). Scanning the introductory table of contents is helpful as this is considered to be a ‘bridge between the external claims made for the materials and what will actually be presented inside the materials themselves’ (McDonough and Shaw, 1993, p. 67). The detailed topics, functions, structures/grammar and skills of the textbook are usually presented here. This step in the evaluation process reveals the lesson topics and the objectives of the textbook. A good textbook should include topics which excite learners’ curiosity, introduce something new to learners, and meet learners’ interests and their local references and concise objectives (Tomlinson, 1998). The vocabulary lists, glossaries, and expansion exercises at the end of the book are also important, as they provide learners with more opportunities to use the language covered in each lesson of the book.

Whilst-use evaluation

Whilst-use evaluation, according to Tomlinson (2003), involves evaluating materials in use. This can be more reliable than pre-use evaluation, as it involves deeper evaluation of the content of materials (i.e. the layout, activities and tasks, vocabulary and grammar, flexibility, etc.) and makes use of classroom observation and feedback from the users. It also involves studying: organization and structure, activities and tasks, vocabulary and grammar, supporting resources; and language level (Tomlinson, 2003). These aspects are briefly described below.

Textbook organization and structure

This refers to the presentation and arrangement of language material and activities in a textbook. The organization of activities within a unit and of units within the textbook is another aspect of interest. Activities which appear in a logical order as a well-organized and carefully graded lesson can help learners achieve what Tomlinson (1998 & 2011) calls ‘mental readiness to acquire the points being taught’.

Tomlinson (2011) advises that language knowledge should be introduced in a spiral fashion. For example, the present continuous tense should first be introduced to describe an action happening at the moment of speaking, and later re-introduced to describe something that is going to happen. The organization and sequencing of each unit in a textbook should recycle or reinforce grammar structures, vocabulary items, and other language functions to assist learners to store them in their long-term memory. It is helpful for a textbook to have review lessons at regular intervals.

Activities

The evaluation may focus on the extent to which there is a variety of activities in the textbook. The activities should include topics and texts from real-world situations and be challenging enough to cater to both weak and good learners (Tomlinson, 2003). There should be easy activities for weak learners to do and challenging activities to encourage good learners to be involved in the activities. There should be both form-focused tasks, meaning-focused tasks, and mixed tasks at different stages of units.

Vocabulary and grammar

For the evaluation of vocabulary and grammar, the researcher found Cunningsworth’s (1995) work to be a useful supplement that can be used within Tomlinson’s (2003) framework. In his work, he suggested a list of criteria to assess the vocabulary presented in a textbook as follows: (1) Is vocabulary learning material central to the course? (2) How much vocabulary is taught?; (3) Is there any principal basis for selection of vocabulary?; (4) Is there any distinction between active and passive vocabulary or classroom vocabulary?; (5) Does material enable students to expand their own vocabulary independently by helping them to develop their own learning strategies? (Cunningsworth, 1995: 41)

Tomlinson (2003) adds that vocabulary and grammatical structures should be introduced in ways appropriate to the learner level and recycled at intervals within the textbook. The presentation and practice of vocabulary and grammar should take into consideration student levels, bearing in mind that at lower levels ‘students can communicate more effectively with knowledge of vocabulary than with knowledge of grammar’ (Cunningsworth, 1995: 38).

Language level

The language level refers to whether the language used in the textbook is suitable for learners’ ages. The language should be at the right level for learners. Although ‘an authentic text, oral or written, is one whose primary intent is to communicate meaning’ in EFL classrooms, the language input must be comprehensible (Tomlinson, 2011).

Post-use evaluation

This research was designed to find out how helpful the textbook is to the teachers and what the textbook really helps them in teaching and learning, what they feel about the textbook, and whether they recommend using it again or not.

Method

This research used a qualitative approach based on the theory of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) as cited in Nursakina (2018). The purpose of this study is to know whether the three books used in the secondary schools in Tegal, i.e. “*Mandiri: Practise Your Sentence*”, “*Interactive English 2*”, and “*New Headway*” are good or not, and reveal the strength and weaknesses of the three books. This study employed textbook evaluation criteria developed by the researcher based on the Tomlinson’s (2003) framework. There are five criteria for a good textbook such as physical appearance, textbook organization and structure, activities, vocabulary and grammar, and language level. Thus, this study belongs to evaluation research. The instrument of collecting data used in this research was a checklist criteria of good textbooks that the researcher developed based on Tomlinson’s (2003) framework

Table 1. Criteria of Good Textbooks Used in this Research

Stage of Evaluation		Criteria
I	Pre-use evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical appearance The evaluation of the physical appearance covers the price, the quality and size of paper the book is printed on; whether the print is easy to read; and the pictures, colors, artwork are good or not.
II	Whilst-use evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Textbook organization and structure This refers to the presentation and arrangement of language material and activities in a textbook (design and layout, topics, breakdown, and sequencing each unit). Activities The activities should include topics and text from real-world situations and be challenging enough to cater to both weak and good learners. There should be both form-focused tasks, meaning-focused tasks, and mixed tasks at different stages of units to develop the learners’ language use and skills. Vocabulary and grammar Vocabulary and grammatical structures should be introduced in ways appropriate to the learner level and recycled at intervals within the textbook. The presentation and practice of vocabulary and grammar should take into consideration student levels, bearing in mind that at lower levels ‘students can communicate more effectively with knowledge of vocabulary than with a knowledge of grammar’. Language level The language level refers to whether the language used in the textbook is suitable for learner ages. The language should be at the right level and of the right type for learners.
III	Post-use evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study tends to be designed to find out how helpful the textbook for the teachers and pupils, what the textbook really helps them in teaching and learning process, what they feel about the textbook and whether they recommend using it again or not.

The research participants in this study were the teachers who used the three English textbooks in three junior high schools in Tegal in the year 2018. The data collecting technique in this study was observation, questionnaire, and document review.

Observation

The data from this study was collected through several steps of observation. (1) The researcher observed the content of the three textbooks by reading them carefully and thoroughly; (2) The researcher compared the contents of the textbooks with the criteria of good textbooks based on the criteria of good textbooks as arranged by the researcher based on Tomlinson's (2003) framework; (3) The researcher used a checklist developed from the criteria that would be used in this research in order to describe the levels of the three textbooks related to the criteria of good textbooks.

Questionnaire

In this research, the researcher used questionnaires to collect the data based on the teachers' opinions. The content of the questionnaires was about the textbooks which have the relevant competencies with the subject. The purpose of this data collecting technique was to make sure the similarities of a point of view between teachers and the researcher. The researcher would gather the information from the English teachers about her or his teaching experiences and opinion about the English textbooks.

Document Review

Document analysis is a compliment for use of observation in qualitative research. The document can be in the form of writing, picture, and monumental works. Since the subject of this research is in the form of the textbook, the researcher used document analysis to collect the data such as the content of the textbook.

To analyze the data, the researcher used following steps based on Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) as cited in Nursakina (2018). Those steps are data collection, data reduction, data display, and giving a conclusion.

Data Collection

The researcher collected the data through the techniques defined before. The data of this research were taken through the observation, based on the plan, do, and see activities.

Data reduction

First, classified the strengths and weaknesses of the textbooks based on the contents of the textbooks related to the evaluation criteria of good textbooks as arranged by the researcher based on the Tomlinson's (2003) framework on evaluation textbook criteria modified by evaluation criteria from other authors. Second, identified the strengths and the weaknesses of the textbooks based on the content of the textbooks related to the criteria fulfilments.

Data Display

Selected some sample activities, tasks, or pictures from the three textbooks as supporting evidence to see whether the content of the textbooks is appropriate or not with the evaluation criteria of good textbooks as arranged by the researcher based on Tomlinson's (2003) and others' frameworks.

Giving Conclusion

Having collected, reduced, and displayed the data, the researcher drew the conclusion based on the results of the research.

Findings and Discussion

Comparison of the three English Textbooks

Regarding organization and structure, *Mandiri Practise Your English Competence* has 12 units, *Interactive English 2* has 13 units, and *New Headway* has 14 units. Similar to *Interactive English 2*, *New Headway* has an 'exposure' section named 'starter' and 'grammar rules' named 'grammar spots' in each unit, not presented in *Mandiri Practise Your English Competence*. Both of *Interactive English 2* and *Mandiri Practise Your English Competence* have summary sections in their sections, *Mandiri Practise Your English Competence* at the beginning of the section, while *Interactive English 2* is almost at the end of the section, which not present in *New Headway*. But for the practices or activities both of three English textbooks have it.

Different to *New Headway* that has four sections in each units (starter, presentations of new language, practice, everyday English), and *Interactive English 2* which has five sections in each units (exposure, activities, learning journal, summary, evaluation unit), *Mandiri Practise Your English Competence* only has two sections in each unit, they are Summary and Practice.

New Headway and *Interactive English 2* have similar content pages listing all knowledge areas in detail, including grammar, vocabulary, skills work (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and writing in the textbooks. For *Mandiri Practise Your English Competence*, there are only grammar, vocabulary, writing, and reading, without speaking and listening sections. In general, it has some similar structures with both of three English textbooks.

Based on the organization and structure, *Interactive English 2* has more section activities than *New Headway* and *Mandiri Practise Your English Competence* to promote students' active contribution to the learning process. Moreover, *Interactive English 2* is better than two others at providing students with a feeling of progress in the learning journal, which may encourage them to study more.

In activities and tasks, the three English textbooks have a variety of activities and tasks, including free practice in "Practice" and both form-focused (gap-filling activities focusing in grammar and meaning-focused practice (practice in giving situations such as in a shop, in a cafe, etc.). It consists of individual and pair and group work activities and tasks. Those activities and tasks help encourage learners to interact through many information-gap activities in which learners are asked to exchange information given to each of them through pictures or given information in reading texts to fulfill the tasks by reading and speaking-section.

The common things they both have are a sub-section (usually before practice) in which vocabulary is introduced through matching activities and a vocabulary list at the end of each textbook. Comparison of theoretical evaluation and questionnaire findings of the three English textbooks are attached in the appendices.

Conclusion

The finding of the evaluation in the previous chapter enabled the researcher to draw some conclusions as follows:

In answering to the research question

Do the three English textbooks used by the eighth graders in Tegal meet the criteria for a good textbook based on the evaluation criteria based on the Tomlinson's (2003) framework?

the following data is obtained: (1) *Mandiri: Practise Your English Competence* meets the criteria only in language level criterion of a good textbook; (2) *Interactive English 2* meets all of the criteria (five): physical appearance, organization and structure, activities, vocabulary and structure, and language level; (3) *New Headway* meets three criteria: physical appearance, organization, and structure, vocabulary and grammar.

In answering to the second research question

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the three English textbooks used by eighth graders in Tegal based on the evaluation criteria of good textbooks as arranged by the researcher based on the Tomlinson's (2003) framework?

the following data is obtained: (1) The main strength of *Mandiri: Practise Your English Competence* lies in the language level which is simple and understandable. Its main weakness is it has too many tests in every unit which do not cover all the skills learnt. It also lacks a good form of illustration, showing illustrations which are too simple and uninteresting for the eighth graders; (2) The main strength of *Interactive English 2* lies in its colorful and attractive photos and cartoons, which will impress the students, and its use of authentic text that is trendy in graphic design. Its main weakness lies in its focus on controlled practice; (3) The main strength of *New Headway* lies in its colorful and attractive photos and cartoons that will interest the students and also its use of communicative activities to make the students more creative and active in the classroom. However, the main weakness lies in its the sentences which are too hard to understand for the eighth graders in Tegal.

References

- Cunningsworth, A. (1984). *Evaluating and selecting EFL teaching materials*. London: Heinemann.
- Cunningsworth, A. (1995). *Choosing your coursebook*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Ellis, R., (1997). The empirical evaluation of language teaching materials. *ELT Journal*, 51(1), 36-42.
- Fentari, R. (2018). *An evaluation of English textbooks for the eleventh grade of SMA N 1 Bantul. Thesis*. Yogyakarta: Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa.
- McDonough, J & Shaw, C., (1998). Evaluating ELT materials, in Crystal, D. & Jonson, K. (eds.). *Materials and Methods in ELT*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp.63-81.
- McDonough, J. & Shaw, C., (1993). *Materials and methods in ELT*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- McGrath, I., (2002). *Materials evaluation and design for language teaching*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Nunan, D. (2003). The impact of English as a global language on educational policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific Region. *TESOL quarterly*, 37(4), 589-613. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588214>
- Nursakina, H. (2018). *An analysis of three english textbooks for the eleventh grade of senior high school. Thesis*. Yogyakarta: Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa.
- Nuruhidin, A., Putra, F., Pamungkas, O., Ardiyanto, H., & Saputro, D. (2018). An evaluation of powerlifting and weightlifting development program. *Psychology, Evaluation, and Technology in Educational Research*, 1(1), 1-8. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.33292/petier.v1i1.19>
- Tomlinson, B. (2011). *Material Development in Language Teaching*(2nd Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tomlinson, B., (1998). *Materials development in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press, pp.1-24.
- Tomlinson, B., (2003). Materials evaluation, in Tomlinson, B. (ed.). *Developing Materials for Language Teaching*. London: Continuum, pp.15-36.